



## Case Studies

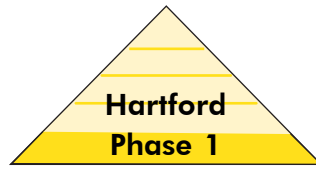
## Case Study 2

## Evolution of the Environmental Justice Movement in Hartford, CT

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During the 1960's and 1970's Hartford lost much of its manufacturing base, and the middle class fled to the suburbs. In 1990, Hartford's population was approximately 130,000 people, with 70% minority including 36% Black and 34% Latino. Residents live in an area of 18.4 square miles with 17 neighborhoods. Hartford is the 8<sup>th</sup> poorest city in the country and hosts a regional landfill, sewage treatment plant, sewage sludge incinerator, trash-to-energy incinerator, and four small electrical generation plants. The trash-to-energy incinerator contributes 56% of the non-traffic air pollution. Two major interstate highways (I-84 and I-91) border Hartford and four state highways traverse the city producing 70% of the mobile source carbon monoxide. Childhood lead poisoning rates are twice the state average. The Connecticut River, an American Heritage River, has a fish consumption alert due to high levels of mercury in the watershed. The Park River and Piper Brook have high bacteria levels and metals contamination from combined sewer overflows, point source and non-point source runoff. Sprawl and lack of investment created 339 acres of vacant land and nearly 1,000 abandoned buildings. Hartford is a city where money is made, but not locally invested.

This case study will examine the role of the UEI and community partners to create a new climate in Hartford where the community's voice influences decisions that are reversing years of environmental injustice and are changing the quality of the environment where they live, work and play.



### Phase 1: Understanding the Problem & Identifying Stakeholders

UEI's initial efforts in Hartford were met with mistrust by the community. The UEI participated in local community meetings and sponsored focus groups to start building credibility and begin understanding the range of issues facing residents. These meetings were a catalyst to bring stakeholders together and marked the first time local residents saw government listening and not dictating. The key community concerns included chronic respiratory illnesses, lack of environmental health data available to the public, lack of political



*Community member in Hartford, CT calls for action against toxic pollution.*

representation, and no support for community needs. Community stakeholders also expressed concern over the local landfill and possible adverse health effects. Residents were also worried that local air pollution caused by neighboring waste facilities and heavy highway traffic could be keeping their children sick.

UEI's key partners were ONE/CHANE, Inc. and the Hartford Health Dept. (HHD). ONE/CHANE is a nonprofit organization working to rebuild North Hartford to meet resident driven priorities and resolve environmental problems. The UEI helped these partners sponsor a conference titled "Redefining the Urban Environment" to bring together a broad range of stakeholders for a dialogue and greater awareness of local environmental justice issues and community concerns. UEI's work with the HHD expanded the Environmental Health Division to improve access to accurate and timely information of concern to the public and enabled the HHD to work more effectively with local constituents.

UEI's efforts were enhanced by environmental justice site tours to raise awareness of the realities of the environmental problems in Hartford. Securing participation and support from EPA New England staff was viewed by residents as critical to the success of the UEI pilot program and included the Regional Administrator, EPA's senior management team, and program managers. Congressional representatives, the Mayor, heads of state agencies, local political leadership, grassroots groups and the media were also engaged and informed. These early efforts and partnerships with community stakeholders laid a strong



foundation for identifying projects that would start to address the greatest concerns of Hartford residents.



## Phase 2: Building Capacity & Developing Local Partnerships

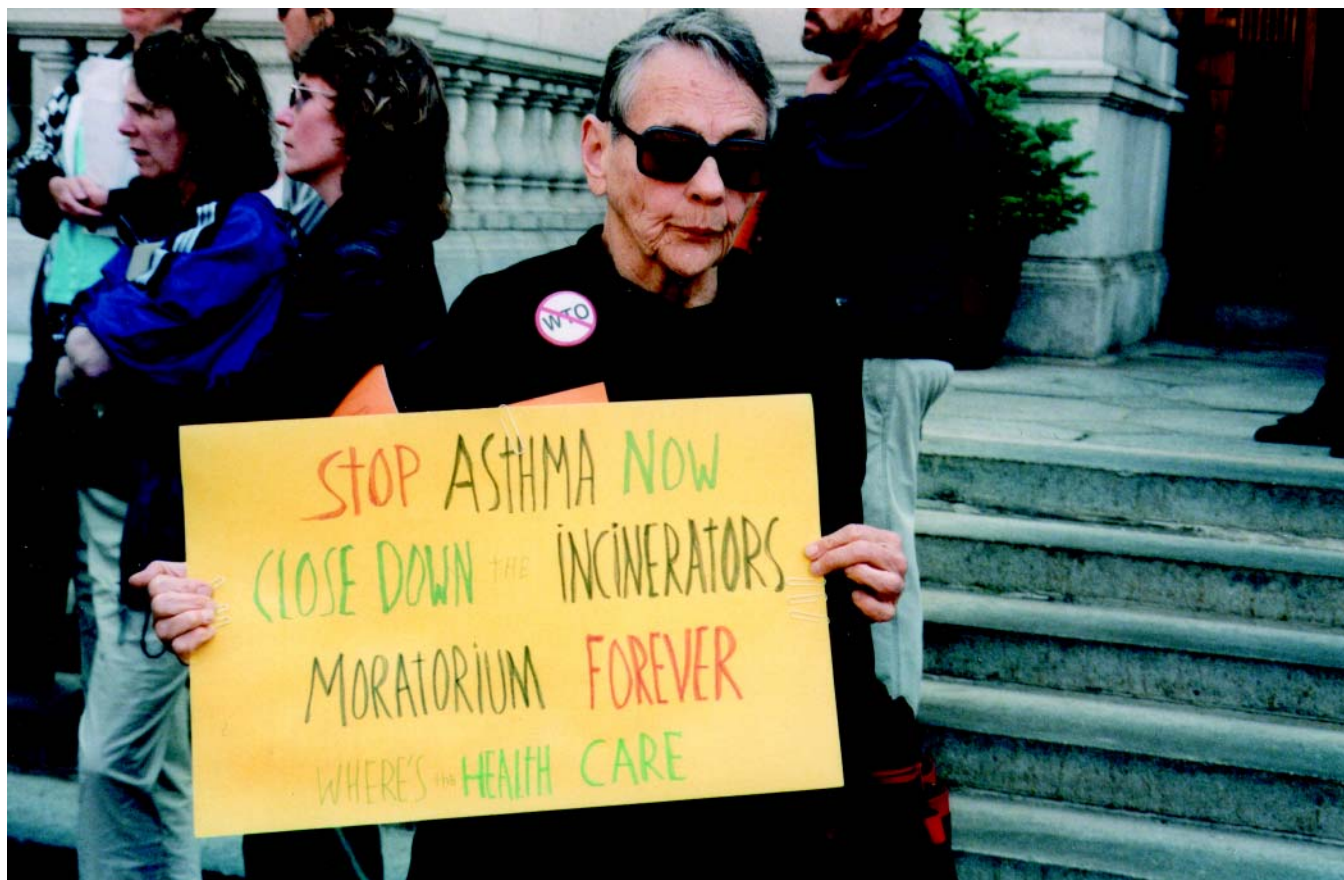
Once the UEI started to build relationships with a few partners and learned community concerns, the next step was to engage more stakeholders and work together to understand the scope of the environment and public health problems in the city. UEI's funding and technical assistance helped community partners develop the skills

and knowledge needed to be informed and involved in local decision making. Funding also supported our flagship partners and projects with new partners including Building Parent Power (BPP), Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART), and Knox Parks. Representatives from these groups, residents, and local block captains received a series of UEI sponsored trainings on environmental education, data gathering and evaluation, and GIS. The UEI also worked with ONE/CHANE to educate residents and youth in the Northeast and Clay Arsenal neighborhoods and conduct hundreds of door to door community surveys to involve more residents.

UEI's partnership with BPP, a parent led advocacy organization, convened environmental justice education and awareness sessions for residents in

English and Spanish. The sessions increased awareness and understanding of the connections between the quality of the environment and public health. Each session identified local resources and offered practical tools for parents to address asthma, lead poisoning, integrated pest management, and the city's rat crisis. This project directly involved parents and promoted accountability and safer indoor environments in public schools.

The UEI also worked with HART, Knox Parks and ONE/CHANE to address illegal dumping on vacant and abandoned land, urban blight, and economic development in low income and minority neighborhoods. Creating community gardens helped partners transform abandoned, trash strewn lots into productive gardens one lot at a time. The gardens gave residents



*Community resident advocates for cleaner air and a response to asthma prevalence in Hartford, CT.*

## Knox Parks Chestnut Hill Reclamation Project

When Knox Parks Foundation considered reclaiming a series of vacant lots in Hartford and turning them into a large urban green space with multiple uses, lead contamination was the last thing on their mind. The community-based organization was working in partnership with members of the Clay Hill neighborhood and developed a detailed plan to turn this two acre vacant lot into a passive park and an urban garden with a teaching area for used by students of the local Quirk Middle School. Full implementation of this plan was stalled after soil sampling revealed lead levels on the majority of the site that were over the residential threshold established by the Hartford Dept. of Health. In 1998, the UEI helped Knox Parks Foundation successfully obtain resources through the RCRA Enforcement Division by using resources from a Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) in Hartford to



remediate the lead from the soil by using phytoremediation. Phytoremediation uses certain types of plants as crops to absorb the lead through their leaves and stems and significantly reduces lead levels from soil over time. The Chestnut Street Reclamation Project sponsored an Earth Day celebration and work day to begin the first phase of transforming the lot into a passive park and urban garden. Students from the Quirk Middle School, along with volunteers from local community groups, EPA's CT State Unit and the UEI worked side by side removing trash, debris and planting trees and shrubs. Subsequent events engaged an additional 20 students from Trinity College, local community groups and EPA staff to transform this open space into a community garden by constructing fencing, raised beds, and planting vegetables and flowers. The result of this combined effort has turned a vacant lot into a productive, enjoyable and safe urban greenspace for the public.



ownership and pride in the neighborhood. UEI funding and technical assistance established an effective, working partnership between formerly competing community groups to produce environmental results.

The Hartford Neighborhood Environmental Project (HNEP) was launched in 1995 by the CT-DEP's Pollution Prevention Office to work with residents and businesses to promote pollution prevention, quality of life improvements, and enhance economic development in two neighborhoods. The UEI provided multi-year funding to expand the original project to service seven Hartford neighborhoods. Over four years, HNEP used voluntary and traditional enforcement techniques to produce results. HNEP initiated a series of efforts including: train-the-trainer seminars for neighborhood leaders on environmental issues; reclaiming hundreds of pounds of Mercury through community thermometer exchanges and household hazardous waste collection days; cleaning over 100 illegal neighborhood dump sites; introducing recycling in a 90 unit cooperative housing project; developing a plan to turn a one acre illegal dumping site into a garden and recreational area; and hosting Poster & Poem Contests for Hartford schools. The UEI joined CT-DEP and community partners to host Earth Day Conferences with forums on household pollution prevention, managing construction and demolition waste, asthma awareness, reducing lead paint poisoning, air and water pollution, deterring illegal dumping, sustainable development, and creating community gardens. These small project successes continued to build trust between community partners and demonstrated that working together can achieve results.



### **Phase 3: Leveraging Resources to Improve Public Health & the Environment**

Improving public health and the environment in Hartford required coordination among stakeholders and dedicated resources. The HNEP's program continued to grow and expand and their education and outreach activities to empower thousands of Hartford residents to be aware of their actions and the impact on the environment. HNEP has fostered environmental stewardship, partnership development, and collaborative environmental problem solving.

The Capitol Region Roundtable was created by community partners and supported by the UEI to enhance previous community collaborations and unify major stakeholders across Hartford neighborhoods. The UEI was a partner in the Roundtable and helped host forums on environmental and public health issues which impact residents within the Capitol Region. The Roundtable and community partners hosted an Environmental Justice Community Forum and Environmental Justice Tour for EPA's National Environmental Justice Director.

The strength of the foundation built by the UEI and our community partners through a few years of small scale project work was soon tested by a public health crisis. An article in the Hartford Courant reported that the asthma rate in Hartford is more than five times the national average. The

UEI, HEJN, Capitol Region Roundtable, and community partners responded quickly by launching an asthma education campaign through public forums, a media campaign and an Asthma Policy Forum. Targeted education and outreach for local officials resulted in the City Council declaring an "Asthma Emergency". The partners also held an Asthma Legislative Briefing to promote greater awareness among legislators about the severity of the asthma epidemic and provided recommendations for policy development. The UEI leveraged EPA New England Indoor Air Quality technical experts and sponsored community trainings on asthma prevention, triggers and EPA's Tools for Schools Program with ConnectiCOSH. Local parents created demand to start implementing EPA's Tools for Schools and Integrated Pest Management strategies in Hartford schools.

The UEI also worked with the HHD, University of Connecticut Environmental Research Institute, and the John Snow Institute to develop a website to share Hartford specific information with the public. Staff time, materials, and information were dedicated from nearly two dozen state, local, and community sources to work together to produce a quality website. Environmental health issues covered in the web site include lead poisoning prevention, asthma, indoor air quality, outdoor air quality, open/green space, brownfields and environmental justice.

Another example of how the UEI links agency resources with community needs is the collaboration that addressed public concerns about contamination on Pliny Street in Hartford. The abandoned site once hosted a plating company and the soil

contained high levels of hexavalent chromium and other dangerous toxic substances. Resources were leveraged from local, state, and federal sources to safely secure the site, conduct sampling and community outreach, hold public information meetings, and plan for future site reuse. Partners included the UEI, EPA New England Emergency Response, Brownfields Pilot Program, CT Dept. of Public Health, CT-DEP, City of Hartford, HHD, Pliny Street Block Association, Clay Arsenal Neighborhood Revitalization Zone, and My Sister's Place shelter for women and children. These project successes set the stage for a more effective and diverse partnership to develop which would transition UEI's role from one of leadership to participating as one of many voices working together to solve problems in Hartford.



#### **Phase 4: Effective Partnerships**

The Hartford Environmental Justice Network (HEJN) was formed in response to community concerns about the siting of another fossil-fueled power generator in South Hartford, and has served as a foundation to unify many community groups and stakeholders around common issues and events. Residents were concerned that this new project would be the tenth power generator located next to a predominantly Black and Latino community already overburdened with many air pollution sources. The HEJN soon developed a reputation for holding major local polluters accountable for

activities that endanger public health. The HEJN has grown to include over 30 neighborhood and community groups including UEI with over 1,000 members. What the HEJN has accomplished as an effective partnership is unprecedented in Hartford's history. HEJN members researched the issues related to hosting a new fossil-fueled power generator, raised public awareness about the relationship between air pollution and respiratory health, requested a public hearing, and arranged the first environmental public information session by neighborhood groups. This was a highly successful strategy that led to an agreement where Northeast Utilities actually removed the new power generator.

The environmental enlightenment in Hartford initiated by the UEI, ONE/CHANE, HEJN and our other community partners led to the foundation



*Dr. Mark Mitchell addresses residents and activists at a public awareness event in Hartford, CT.*





*Local activists and residents in Hartford, CT protest pollution from industry.*

of the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice. This state-wide coalition expands and enhances the efforts of the HEJN through its mission to “protect urban environments” in the State of Connecticut.



### **Phase 5: Healthy Communities**

Today in Hartford there are organized community residents, with a common purpose, and effective and lasting partnerships that work together to slowly reverse a history of environmental injustice, guard against environmental vandals, air polluters, and hazardous waste dumpers. Residents of Hartford

are now empowered with knowledge and awareness of environmental laws, regulations and policies that exist to protect them. When enforced, those laws, regulations and processes champion their cause for environmental justice. It has taken several years, but the environmental results from capacity building and focusing resources are evident. Hartford residents participate in greater numbers in local and regional efforts to safeguard and improve the quality of the environment and public health. Environmental justice partnerships have successfully blocked the siting of any medical waste storage and disposal in the City of Hartford, and defeated a proposal to site the largest truck stop in New England. Local, state and federal governments are partnering with organized neighborhood groups to promote healthy communities.

The residents of Hartford have fought long and hard for their cries of injustice to be heard. Finally, their perseverance is beginning to pay off. The first African-American to be elected on the Green Party ticket ran on an environmental justice platform. Connecticut now requires industry to actively engage and solicit input from the community whenever applying or reapplying for permits. Developers now solicit input from the HEJN and the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice prior to designing redevelopment plans. There is a new level of respect for the voice and needs of the community and a willingness to find common ground to respond to community concerns whenever making environmental decisions.

# Environmental Justice in Hartford, CT

